

Can education gap be bridged worldwide? | Inside Story (ALJAZEERA)

What's keeping millions of children away from school worldwide? UNESCO says it's poverty and discrimination and coronavirus is making things even worse so what should be done to secure education for all and can that gap be bridged?

This is inside story hello and welcome to the program. I'm Peter Dobie.

Girls, immigrants, ethnic minorities and the disabled just some of the world's children at risk of not getting any education the United Nations says poverty and discrimination continue to prevent huge numbers from going to school the total was around 260 million children two years ago and that figure will be higher now because of the Covid-19 pandemic 40% of low and lower middle income countries failed to support teaching during the global spread of the corona virus many students were cut off from online courses during school national lock downs, the UN's educational organization UNESCO in certain countries to support those left behind as life does begin to creep back towards something approaching normal. UNESCO also found half of the world's children who don't go to school that's 97 million live in sub-saharan, Africa 95 million don't go to school in central and southern Asia another 17 million in the Arab world and North Africa and 12 million in Latin America and the Caribbean less than 10 percent of countries have inclusive educational laws and just 41 out of 195 countries worldwide officially recognized sign language. The UN says educational systems have failed to take special needs into account let's bring in our guests joining us today on Inside Story from Paris we have Manos Antoninus director of global education monitoring their report from UNESCO from Rabat we have lassen haddad international consultant of the World Bank and from Palo Loompa we'll be joined by Maan al-khatib professor at the Islamic University of Malaysia. Gentlemen welcome to you all.

Lassen had a this is about bridging the gap I guess how do we do it? I mean it sound like the report, the UNESCO report said something very important. It said that in low and middle income countries at lessons from the richest 20% of all households were 03 times as likely to complete lower secondary school as were those from the poorest homes this is very significant and this is due to the to the fact that the richest kids have better access generally like to private schools in some situations but also I mean the benefits from the capacity of their parents and also of their households to mobilize out of class to dream and also to social and psychological support from parents on the other hand what we find is like in most public schools attended by children coming from poor and low-income families they suffer from teacher absenteeism from lack of adequate teaching infrastructure and equipment it is overcrowded miss most of the times and it is poor stakeholder involvement in the sense that the middle-class families have moved away from public schools to private schools and so there is like a stakeholder kind of crisis with regard to these kinds of public schools so less interaction between the teachers and the families because bombing for these kinds of shows that for these kinds of poor children that's why there is this kind of underperforms there is this kind of big gap and the gap is widening actually I mean in some in some countries especially in sub-saharan Africa okay we'll get onto that in more detail in just a moment manners Antoninus in Paris this report identifies three overarching issues ability background and identity which of those issues is the easiest to solve it is not really easy for any society to solve the problem of inclusion related to these three aspects of individuals every society needs to confront and be frank and honest about addressing this issue what the 2020 global education monitoring report does that we launched today is precisely to a bit of more shape a bit of more understanding into what inclusion actually means because all countries signed up to ensure inclusive education by 2030 but for many countries inclusion as a term tends to be associated just with disability and the report argues that the understanding has actually grown because the very same mechanisms that exclude children with disabilities from education and by excluding we mean both keeps them out of school but also while in school while in classroom they don't do as well as their peers the same mechanisms also exclude other children who may be vulnerable because of belonging and twisting ethnicity belonging to some minority it's of course being poor as very rightly was mentioned before because we should adds to this point that it's not only that they three times their reaches are three times more likely to complete lower security

school those who do reach the end of logic and school the rich are twice as likely to reach in achieve basic skills so this is compounded over the years man Hattie in kuala lumpur your region i guess was ahead of the curve when it came to being innovative with virtual classrooms and children learning online but that's only as good as your computer infrastructure so if you've got urban or rural areas it's a belt and braces exercise is back to basics but in that situation what happens to children who need to be supported through education but they're not being supported by the school yes all right actually in in countries like Malaysia for example the country have they've done quite good Internet infrastructure and nevertheless when the co19 hit the globe we saw that some rural areas suffered from lack of such infrastructure for example I myself have a student who has to travel ten fifteen minutes away from his home to find a good internet service or Wi-Fi service so he can use it to join the online meetings with his colleagues another student in Saba she had to climb a tree to get stable 3G internet connection and she had to even sleep overnight or spent overnight in the jungle to sit for her online exam other countries like Indonesia which is the most populous nation in the region we are talked about maybe 56% of the more than 250 million population have access to the Internet the remaining like 44 percent suffering from lack of having accessibility to the Internet so having the device alone is not actually sufficient to have stable and good internet connection is very crucial for providing virtual or learning on the virtual space so I think that is kind of a challenge where the government the government's in in general have to look into closing this gap and providing proper internet and devices services for the students to be able to cope with their colleagues no matter where they are Larsen had ads in Rabat when we talk about closing the gap here could the situation actually be worse than we know because the data the numbers of children who aren't getting any form of Education the data comes from the schools therefore it's passed on to relevant education departments it's not gathered say in a census situation where people from the government are knocking on doors and saying how many children live here therefore how many children are not going to school properly data is really really important and the poorer the countries the less they data reliability exists and I think mostly the schools actually it would do the data what needs to be done is actually like have census and then in relation to that census you can compare the data that comes to schools in order to see the difference in those kinds of situations but even like even this school is themselves they are not equipped to do the data correctly and also there is a problem with the quality of data that is gathered in so many schools of course there are programs and some of them are supported by international organizations in order to improve the data quality that is that is gathered by schools and also to improve the skills after school principals and also the school administration with regard to that but I think there is a lot of that that I mean like the lot of children who are not reported especially those who do not show up because we don't know I'll be like how many of those exist and all of that and also because there is not much statistics with regard to the sociology of an area in order to compare the degree and also the level of schooling that's a very important question and I think that needs also to be addressed and and there are different ways in which it can be addressed and one of them also is to have courses for example like a social register in which all D be the I mean like all the citizens are registered with their children and also that to be updated with the in relation to the birth certificates and then I make that I mean like compare that you would be to the registration that exists within the schools I mean that way you can have redefine I mean like a viable statistics with regard to the schooling and also to who goes to school and who does not go there are some situations where even like the drop out is not isn't that very well I'm gonna pause you there because that's that's a very full answer but there are other areas within our discussion I would like to move towards if I'm a man or Santa - in Paris lest we think this is a universally depressing aspect of being a primary school or secondary school there are some some success stories here some schools in Kenya they teach in 21 languages now doesn't come down to internet access it doesn't come down to rural infrastructure it doesn't come down to children having to sleep in a jungle overnight because they want to go and take an exam that's one of the examples that the report identifies that comes down to cultural flexibility so why is it some schools this one particular school in Kenya can teach in 21 languages but a school ten miles down the road can't teach in so many languages well very important question because the issue of inclusion sometimes is not just about money often people say inclusion costs actually no it doesn't cost if you plan in advance to be inclusive for example starting from school building if you plan in advance to make the building accessible to students with disabilities then that will make hardly any difference to the total cost if you try to expose try to correct all the things that will not put properly that makes the cost very high and if you look at the classroom as you said it's often just a matter of a gesture an inclusive teacher a teacher who is prepared to listen to every student's needs

and address them properly doesn't need to do much often is a matter of opening to them the way the teacher groups the children in the classroom the way the teacher uses the language that is respectful of all children there are so many ways that don't necessarily cost yes it's true just to bring it back the data discussion it will be quite costly for countries to find out exactly what is happening and that will require perhaps the support of international organizations but when it comes to being inclusive it is a matter of a commitment it's a commitment that goes at all levels we just talked about the school the teachers the school leaders are of course important how they engage with the community how they reach out to them to make sure that their voices are also heard and then going out to the administration how responsive and how responsible education officials feel at the county level at the district level all the way up to the center level were different government officials because we're talking about inclusion we talked about multiple overlapping social problems the department's of Education and Health and Social Protection and the local governments that are supposed to provide these services are talking to each other okay c'mon Hattie please Manos Antoninus in Kuala Lumpur man coming to you how does an education Authority however or a school if a country is flexible enough to teach primary school children and secondary school education to teenagers I guess in multiple languages or different dialects that keeps them does it not perhaps tethered to staying in the country so if you look at an Indian state like a dish' which some people contributing to the report are basically saying that's the gold standard for teaching in India especially at a primary school level but if you teach them in their own language so many Indians move around the globe for work so they get the education but then they maybe don't have the language skills that they need to go into a university degree or to go and live and work abroad when they say hit there early or mid 20s yes the language actually is quite in this open globe where job opportunities are not limited to your country anymore language is a very important factor in education in Malaysia for example in Southeast Asia in generally most of the countries their medium of instruction in their schools is in their mother tongue language and that that kind of is positive in the sense that when you learn from using your mother tongue that gives you a better opportunity to understand what you are learning and it will facilitate learning much easier to the to the learners however when it comes to looking into the global market and the availability of these students to to be employed using international firms it will be quite challenging and in Malaysia for example we see this kind of situation where because in in Malaysia schools are actually opened according to ethnicity for example the national schools are teaching in in the in the national language Malaysia and we have some schools which are Chinese schools are teaching in Chinese and the Indian schools are teaching in Tamil and among these three we can we can see that English proficiency is not is not that major issue in Malaysia yet it is not interfering to the workability they must there might still be a need to work on improving that and in Malaysia there has been a debate on teaching science and especially science of mathematics subjects in English it has been done at one time and then the the decision was reverted again back to using bahasa malaysia so that kind of decision actually is depends on the intent in the country itself when you're talking about looking the identity of okay lassen haddad in Rabat seems to me that this is something that has to be achieved it's a massive jigsaw and you have to achieve it almost on a school by school or maybe a region by region basis but is it not that this issue is not top-down it's bottom-up you've got to get primary school education right rather than get secondary education right as a priority because if the kids aren't educated properly when they're 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 years old you're not going to have the properly educated children to then go into the secondary school system that that's true and what happens like the quality of education at the primary level is really fundamental and there are countries which have made like significant progress in in terms of that in terms of generalization so there are a lot of primary school I mean all over Africa close to the population and that's good the only problem is like the quality of teaching especially in some remote areas in Austin some rural areas is not really conducive to better achievement at the middle school and the higher school and that's one of the problems so it's like the quality of the infrastructure the quality of teaching and also the the poor conditions in which some of the teachers work that effects like tremendously the primary indication that is offered to kids but at the same time I mean like those who have achieved like a quantitative I mean like access to all kids at the primary level then have faced the other challenge which is that of the middle school and the secondary school at the middle school I mean imposes like more challenges because you cannot build middle schools in every kind of place and then because you have primary feeder schools and then you need to have a secondary school and that secondary school is not close by so that creates all kinds of problems with like transportation or you have dorms you have to have like different kinds of mechanisms in order to make I mean like kids go there and and that raises problems

for you especially for girls and it has been mentioned in the report I mean like a lot of parents are very worried about like sending girls on bicycles or for example on transport too far destinations for the secondary school or also going to the port it's okay dad that that's why there is like very very underachievement in terms of I mean like for girls at the secondary level whereas the gap has been closed at the primary education level it has been a little bit I mean like not closed at the second grade okay especially last night I just want to head into the last five or six minutes of the program roughly Manos Antoninus in Paris some of your contributors on the program today have used the word stakeholder the report makes reference to kind of the idea of stakeholder involvement is that report speak shorthand talk for governments don't really care or some governments don't really care because literally if you're talking about some of the African countries or you're talking about countries in the Middle East you know there are difficult political situations there there are Wars going on all the time and governments after they would say I guess stay focused on making sure their borders aren't breached as opposed to making sure that that 11 year old gets a good education I think a key word is flexibility and partnership and I think the report also says somewhere that essentially inclusion is an exercise in democracy you have to decide what type of society you want to achieve an education is a key lever for making that happen so when it comes to issues of that kind of course there are so many political sensitivities I was mentioning earlier minority issues refugee movements displaced people girls and how women are treated and that's not only in terms of putting them in planets all through cutting across all areas of an education system like the curriculum the language of course we cover already but the textbooks how do you portray every group do you portray every group in the country on equal terms does someone feel their own identity do they feel that they're fairly described if not if children are feeling out the feeling that they ridiculed or that the essentially bullets in the textbook then they're bullied in the classroom and then their opportunity to learn is severely compromised okay if just sheep in Kuala Lumpur man we talked about Southeast Asia we talked about South Asia East Asia sub-saharan Africa we've touched on other areas in Africa as well would it be fair to say do you think that if a country gets this right everyone benefits because we all have a vested interest in having a population that have got either a good basic education or something layered on top of that like a degree level qualification but if a country gets this wrong everyone suffers education is the is the the best investment a country can do because educated population will definitely contribute to the economy to the health sector if we look at Quebec 19 a crisis we see the countries who had good education system managed to build good health facilities and they managed to cope with the crisis quite very very well in Malaysia things went very very well the crisis was managed in a very very good manner and it has been globally recognized and definitely in Malaysia like for example Malaysia is investing a lot on education trying to make education accessible to everyone not not only within the colour of the city but even further to the rural areas there are challenges and wherever we see challenges and we see lack of services we see issues related to employability related to contribution to the to the nation so education is having proper education having inclusive education where everybody is provided with that education and accessibility to schools accessibility to universities definitely that will contribute very well to today to the country from all aspects gentlemen we'll have to leave it there for which I apologize it was a compelling but I think generally a hopeful conversation thank you so much for your time today thanks - I guess they were Manos Antoninus Marcin Haddad and man al-khatib and thank you too for your company you can see the program again anytime by going to our website aljazeera.com and for further discussion go to our Facebook page that's [facebook.com /aj inside story](https://www.facebook.com/aj.inside.story) you can also join the conversation on twitter our handle is at [aj inside story](https://twitter.com/aj.inside.story) or tweet me I'll tweet you back I'm at Peter w1 from me Peter Dhabhi and everyone on the team here in Doha thanks for watching I'll see you tomorrow.